
SATISFACTION LEVEL OF MUMBAI SUBURBAN RAILWAY COMMUTERS WITH RAILWAY CANTEEN SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The Mumbai suburban railway system is one of the busiest urban transport networks in the world, serving millions of commuters daily. Railway canteens and food stalls at stations play a crucial role in catering to passenger's food and beverage needs especially when commuters leave home early to travel 2 to 5 hours a day to and fro. This study examines the satisfaction level of passengers for canteen services, focusing on food quality, hygiene, pricing, availability, and service efficiency. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires from 100 suburban commuters. Secondary data from previous studies and reports on Indian Railways catering were also analysed. The study reveals moderate satisfaction levels, with key concerns related to hygiene, pricing inconsistencies, and service quality. Recommendations are provided to improve commuter satisfaction.

Key words: Mumbai Suburban railway, Canteen

1. INTRODUCTION

Mumbai's suburban railway network serves over 7 million passengers daily, making it a lifeline of the city. Alongside transportation, railway canteens provide essential services such as snacks, beverages, and meals.

Commuters in Mumbai often skip meals at home or work place, so has to rely on food which can be eaten during travelling or at station while waiting for the train. Canteens are typically managed under contracts regulated by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). Despite efforts to standardize catering, several reports indicate persistent issues with food quality and hygiene.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To measure commuter satisfaction with railway canteen services with respect to quality, hygiene, price, service
- To analyse major problems faced by commuters
- To provide suggestions for improving canteen services

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on railway catering in India highlights mixed satisfaction levels:

Gupta & Sharma (2019) in their research paper, titled "Customer satisfaction in railway catering service" had found that passengers generally appreciate the convenience of pantry cars, overall satisfaction with food quality often remains average, however, High satisfaction with food quality and staff behaviour positively influences passengers willingness to re-use catering services and their loyalty to the train journey.

Kumar, A. (2020) in his research "Service quality and passenger satisfaction in Indian Railways" published in the *Journal of Transport and Logistics*, indicated key performance indicators like, cleanliness, punctuality, hygiene, pricing and variety and identified gaps in between passenger expectations and actual service delivery of canteen contractors.

Patel, D. (2018). In his research paper "Impact of hygiene on customer satisfaction in food services" published in *International Journal of Business Research*, found that customer perception on hygiene is often a key factor influencing consumers buying behaviour followed by Cleanliness of the establishment, staff hygiene. Proper food handling and sanitary practices directly contribute to higher customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

All the previous studies, often highlight that while railway canteen may have clear health policies there are lapses in compliance lead to negative customer reviews and dissatisfaction.

4. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H0: There is no significant relationship between hygiene, food quality, pricing, and commuter satisfaction.

H1: There is a significant relationship between hygiene, food quality, pricing, and commuter satisfaction.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The present research is mainly analytical study which requires systematic presentation of study, hence following research was designed.

5.2 Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Survey using structured questionnaire
- **Secondary Data:** Journals, railway reports, news articles

5.3 Sample Size

- 100 respondents (daily commuters from Central and Western lines)

5.4 Sampling Method

- Convenience sampling

5.5 Tools Used

- Percentage analysis
- Regression analysis

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Out of the respondents approached for survey, approximately 50% were regular user (more than 3 to 4 times in a week), 40% were occasional user (on an average once or twice in week) and 10% were rare user (once in fortnight or a month) of a railway canteen on suburban railway stations. Following tables shows the satisfaction level (X axis) for the various factors (Y axis) related to canteen service

Y Axis	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Food Quality and taste	10%	35%	25%	22%	8%
Hygiene of food serving	21%	28%	33%	12%	6%
Cleanliness of canteen	17%	32%	34%	14%	3%
Pricing of Food	36%	28%	24%	10%	2%
Variety of Food options	12%	21%	28%	32%	7%
Service efficiency	43%	32%	20%	4%	1%

Source: Self Compiled

As we can see from the table above compiled on the basis of the response received from sample size, most commuters rely on canteen services occasionally or regularly finds Food quality satisfaction is moderate, with a significant dissatisfied segment. Hygiene is a major concern, tilted towards neutral and dissatisfied commuters, while cleanliness of canteen is satisfactory. Many commuters feel pricing is affordable, however respondents are dissatisfied with the variety and options available at canteen. Service is mostly faster compared to restaurant and street vendors and is appreciable. Based on regression analysis approximately 62% is the satisfaction level of the customers, hence H1, i.e. There is a significant relationship between hygiene, food quality, pricing, and commuter satisfaction is accepted.

7. KEY FINDINGS

- Overall satisfaction level is **moderate**
- Hygiene and cleanliness are the biggest concerns
- Food quality and taste vary across stations however not up to the expectations
- Pricing is perceived as affordable

- Limited menu options reduce satisfaction
- Service speed is acceptable

The findings reflect broader national trends in railway catering. While Indian Railways has implemented monitoring mechanisms, issues like hygiene lapses and inconsistent service persist. Complaints regarding food quality and staff behaviour have also been documented in official reports.

Mumbai's high passenger density further intensifies these challenges, leading to overcrowding at canteens and reduced service quality, however it is also noteworthy that these canteen are the saviour for commuters of the city which runs at a high pace.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve hygiene standards through strict and surprise inspections
- Increase food variety and healthier options adopting to consumer centric approach
- Introduce digital payment and pre-order systems
- Enhance staff training for better service
- Encourage branded and quality-certified vendors

9. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while railway canteens are essential for Mumbai suburban commuters, the satisfaction level is only moderate. Improvements in hygiene, food quality, and service efficiency are necessary to enhance commuter experience. With proper monitoring and policy implementation, railway canteens can significantly improve their service standards will lead to more profits to a canteen contractor and subsequently, attract big players to run the show.

10. REFERENCES

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The bibliography includes all materials referred to during the research process, including general readings and background sources.

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- IRCTC catering manuals and service guidelines
- FSSAI hygiene regulations
- Research journals on customer satisfaction and service quality
- Newspaper articles on railway food quality issues
- Government reports on public service delivery
- Books on research methodology and statistical analysis